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EDUCATIONAL FUTURES PROJECTS

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Books by Author **Howard Pease**

Reviewed by Don Glines

A. About the Author

Howard Pease (1894-1974) had 22 books published between 1926 and 1961, plus numerous short stories in magazine style publications. Born in Stockton CA, after high school graduation, he enrolled at Stanford University.

His college days were interrupted by time spent in France, and by shipping out during summers as a mess boy, wiper, or fireman aboard tramp steamers. He thus wrote from actual experiences as a member of the Black Gang, the engine room crew of the ships. His travels took him to every major port in the U.S., the Caribbean, Italy, France, Mexico, and into hurricane weather in the South Pacific. He eventually graduated from Stanford and entered teaching to ensure that while establishing himself as a writer, he would have an income.

He actually lived many of the stories and experiences in his books. Others he gained from tales told him via his friendship with a sea captain and first mate while he and his wife lived in a house in San Francisco overlooking the bay. He also lived in Tahiti and Australia, and learned about voodoo while one of his ships was in port in Haiti.

He loved to write and attributed many of his talents to those he learned from a creative writing professor at Stanford. However, his 6th grade teacher first interested him in writing, and his continued story efforts in high school started him on the path as an author. Pease had a tremendous ability as a "story-teller," weaving events in such a manner that the reader was continually intrigued to read the next page, the next chapter, the next book. He also had a unique ability to make the reader "see" the setting, and actually "be there" on the ship, in the café, in the alley, in the forecastle, in the engine room, in the port, in the hurricane, on the *Araby* or the schooner *Wind-rider*, or in Marseilles, or Papeete.

Though he wove a story, he also had hidden but clear messages regarding corporate greed, poor labor conditions, religious divergences, actual history as with the underground in World War II, cultural and language differences, family relationships, self-determination for a chosen career, the arts—especially music and painting—and the conditions of the society at the time of publication. He was a master in involving the

reader not only in the story, but also in the social and psychological reflections of his book characters. Howard Pease wrote so that the reader could not put down most of his books until the final chapter.

One of the *strengths* of Pease was also a *weakness*. He wrote each book to stand alone; thus he repeatedly described in detail old freighters and tankers or sleek schooners, deplorable food, sleeping, bathing and working conditions, especially for those assigned to the engine rooms, weak officers, dense fog or horrible hurricanes, and the “weaving a rug” pattern used by Captain Tom Jarvis or Tod Moran to solve a mystery. Often, the plot involved an inexperienced young “landlubber” finally landing a berth as a wiper, mess, or ordinary and becoming a key focus in the story. Often repeated in a hidden manner was how Tod Moran adventures became mysteries, and the loyalty, in most books, of crewmen Topsy and Swede. Such nicknames as “Bilge” were common, as were the names of Blackie, Shortie, Sparks, Joe Macaroni, Bantam, and Slim, and the revelation in a later book, Bound for Singapore (almost a text for teachers of middle school youth) of how he learned to write effectively.

However, this strength of repetition and explanation in a stand-alone book was somewhat a weakness for an avid Pease fan who read over and again the same or similar descriptions, patterns, plots, and characters that often had been the base of a short story before becoming a book, or for one who avidly read a series of Pease books after discovering this author. In defense, it was seldom one would read many of the books at once, nor did the young reader care, so the repetitions and conflicts were not recognized when one read only one of the stories or read several, but over a longer period of time. Thus a possible perceived weakness was truly a strength for most readers.

In many circles, thirteen of the twenty-two Pease books were known as the Tod Moran Mysteries. His sea stories, especially aboard the *Araby* with Tod Moran, Tom Jarvis, Topsy, and Swede, became maritime legends.

B. About the Books

Most of the best Howard Pease books are stories of adventures on the high seas, often aboard the old tramp freighter, the *Araby*. The ship is commanded by Captain Tom Jarvis with loyal crew members as Topsy and Swede, but the focus is usually on Third Mate (and later Second) Tod Moran, plus a young new crew member, a different one in most books. In each they run into a mystery often involving smuggling, greed, theft, international politics, labor conditions, and even murder.

While the *Araby* is in dry dock, these same crew members are sometimes on another ship owned by the same Blakemore Steamship Lines. Occasionally they sail on a ship belonging to another company, perhaps in disguise, enabling them to investigate a

1927: The Jinx Ship

Tod Moran ships out as a wiper on the *Congo*, considered by seamen to be a jinx ship, in his effort to get to San Francisco from New York via the Caribbean, with Toppy and Swede, and new friend, Bruce Harvey, all members of the engine room Black Gang. They are entangled in the mysteries and jinxes of the *Congo*, adventures with voodoo in Haiti, and a fire aboard ship. Copyright: Doubleday and Page, NY (1927) and Sun Dial Press, Garden City NY (1937)

1929: Shanghai Passage

With the *Araby* in dry dock, Captain Tom Jarvis, oiler Tod Moran, Toppy, Swede, and new acquaintance Stuart Ormsby—who unbeknown to Jarvis has been shanghaied aboard the *Nanking*—sail from San Francisco to Shanghai, and become involved in smuggling and the Nationalist Guerrilla Army attempts to seize the *Nanking* and take over control of the government of China. Copyright: Doubleday and Doran, NY (1929) and Sun Dial Press, Garden City NY (1937)

1930: The Gypsy Caravan

Written for younger youth, *The Gypsy Caravan* is an interesting fantasy dream where Betty, age 11, and brother Joe, age 9, join a gypsy caravan through England, France, and Austria. Along the way they have adventures involving Robin Hood, King Richard, Charlemagne, Ali Baba, Caliph of Baghdad, Roland, Aucassin and Nicolette, and the Saracens, Franks, Saxons, and Moors. Copyright: Doubleday and Doran, NY (1930) and Doubleday and Company, NY (1946)

1931: Secret Cargo

Larry Matthews—with his dog Sambo—escapes the police and with the help of Bilge Murphy, secures a job on the *Creole Trader* bound from New Orleans with Toppy and Swede as shipmates. While trying to survive with Sambo, Larry is entrapped by his discovery of the secret cargo stowed on the *Creole Trader* and ensuing events aboard a schooner in the lagoon harbor of Papeete, Tahiti. Copyright: Howard Pease/Sprague Publications (1931) and Sun Dial Press, Garden City NY (1939)

1934: The Ship Without a Crew

Based on true stories—the mystery of the Mary Celeste, and a dolphin that piloted ships into the harbor—this book relates how Tom Jarvis, Tod, Toppy, Swede, and young Stan Ridley sail on the *Araby* for Papeete, but along the way discover the schooner *Wind-Rider*, owned by Stan's father, adrift without a crew. A hurricane, disappearance of the *Wind-Rider*, Stan's missing father, and adventures in Tahiti cap the intrigue. Copyright: Howard Pease/Sprague Publications (1934) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1941)

1935: Wind in the Rigging

Tom Jarvis, Tod Moran, with Toppy, Swede and young Steve Randolph ship on the *Sumatra* from New York to North Africa, with Tom and Tod again as cook and mess, to investigate smuggling on a vessel invested in by the Blakemore Company. Based upon actual Justice Department files, the intrigue takes Tod to inland Morocco to a Berber caravansary where he is seized and imprisoned in the inn of Fondouk el Sous. Copyright: Howard Pease/Sprague Publications (1935) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1944)

1936: Hurricane Weather

Stan Ridley, who had previously shipped on the *Araby* and now was part of Ridley and Son in Papeete, meets Tod Moran who has arrived for a vacation on the Ridley schooner *Wind-Rider*, but a Dr. Latimer offers a handsome fee to charter it to go to islands south of Tahiti where the *Wind-Rider* is stolen, a schemer seeks forbidden pearls, a devastating hurricane hits, a mystery man is discovered, and a schooner is wrecked. Copyright: Howard Pease/Sprague Publications (1936) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1941)

1937: Foghorns

Waiting to load and sail the *Araby* from San Francisco to New Orleans, Tom Jarvis, Tod Moran, Toppy, Swede, and young Greg Richards find themselves blanketed in a thick “pea-soup” fog, with a threatened waterfront strike by disgruntled union workers, fire aboard the *Araby*, mysterious coded messages, and sinister efforts to drive the Blakemore Steamship Company out of business. Copyright: Howard Pease/Sprague Publications (1937) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1942)

1938: Jungle River

Don Carter arrives at Port Moresby, New Guinea, to assist his geological exploration expert father with a mission up the Fly River. His father is not there; rumors from natives say that a seaplane crashed on a lake far to the interior. Don finally has government permission to board a schooner to search for his dad, but is handicapped by competitor company schemers, British police, and headhunter natives while he experiences life in the dense jungle. Copyright: Howard Pease (1938) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1941)

1939: Captain Binnacle

The old paddle wheeler *Pride of the River* is mired in the mud flats of the San Joaquin River. Retired Captain Binnacle and dachshund Waddle can no longer navigate to San Francisco. Unexpectedly they are joined by Janet, Kate, Renny, and George, ages 7 – 11, for an imaginary voyage to Africa. They encounter jungle savages, a mutinous crew, a hurricane, and pirate Jonathan Shark and his cutthroats. *Binnacle* appeals to younger readers. Copyright: George Harrap, London (1939) and Dodd Meade, NY (1942)

1939: Highroad to Adventure

While the *Araby* is in dry dock, Tod Moran plans a driving vacation from San Francisco to the east coast, but is called by Captain Tom Jarvis to drive instead to Mexico City and bring with him important documents related to a Blakemore Company investment in Tasco. Along the Pan-American highway, a rock slide and continuous dangers arise as mysterious or unknown assailants attempt to prevent him from completing his mission. Copyright: Howard Pease (1939) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1941)

1939: Long Wharf

Based upon factual events in 1850 San Francisco, the story includes the famed barkentine *Niantic*, fires, rampant crime, harbor frontage, and 600 ships deserted by crews who left for the gold fields. Danny Mason is left alone to watch the barkentine owned by his father, but Captain Mason disappears as does a Mr. Howard. Danny, Mrs. Howard, and her daughter must survive while searching for lost family members. Copyright: Dodd Mead and Company, NY (1939) and (1942)

1941: The Black Tanker

With the *Araby* temporarily not available, Captain Jarvis and Tod Moran, joined by Toppy and Swede and an inexperienced Rance Warren seeking his father injured in China, accept an assignment on the tanker *Zambora* headed for China with oil for the invading Japanese military. Every effort, including murder, is made by unknown perpetrators to prevent the *Zambora* from reaching its destination. Copyright: Howard Pease/Sprague Publications (1941) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1943)

1942: Night Boat

First published as separate short stories in the *American Boy's Magazine*, these tales of Third Mate Tod Moran and Captain Tom Jarvis, are woven together as diverse, interesting experiences, and combined as sections in Night Boat telling many of the other exciting adventures of Moran and Jarvis. Included are mysteries from the South Pacific and a toll bridge near Stockton, California. Copyright: Howard Pease/Sprague (1935, 36, 37, 42) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1942)

1945: Thunderbolt House

In Stockton, Jud Allen and his family wait for the return of his mother from Uncle Edward Judson's funeral. The family had inherited large sums of money and access to the huge Thunderbolt House (named for Edward's silver mine) located on once famous Bush Street in still sinful San Francisco. A robbery, Jud's inheritance of Edward's book collection, and family intrigue become intertwined with the famous earthquake and fire of 1906. Copyright: Howard Pease (1944) and Doubleday and Doran, NY (1945)

1946: Heart of Danger

The *Araby*, with Captain Jarvis in command, is part of a 1943 convoy off the coast of France; crew members Tod Moran and Rudy Behrens volunteer for a secret mission in Nazi-occupied France where they are led to Paris by the French underground, encounter the Gestapo, terror against the Jews, musical codes, and the Buchenwald Concentration Camp in an effort to forward secret intelligence reports to Allied headquarters. Copyright: Howard Pease (1946) and Doubleday and Company, NY (1946)

1948: Bound for Singapore

Young Chet Hardy and friend Janet are learning to write stories. Chet needs more life experiences and decides to work on a ship bound for Singapore; the only berth he can obtain is on the *Aztec Princess*, bound for New York. Toppy and Swede help him try to protect a prized dog. For younger readers, Chet's journal equals a writing textbook for students and teachers, but is of less interest than the Moran mysteries. Copyright: Howard Pease (1948) and Doubleday and Company, NY (1948)

1950: The Dark Adventure

Johnny Stevens is on his way from Illinois to California to work for his uncle and finish high school, the result of his father's death and family finances. Rather than go by bus, he hitch hikes, but one ride involves a car wreck and his amnesia. Luckily the Whipples come by with their trailer, and thus begins the "dark adventure," as now "Charley Whipple" encounters tramps, police, and escapades as he searches for his lost identity. Copyright: Howard Pease (1950) and Doubleday and Company, Garden City NY (1950)

1953: Captain of the Araby

Captain Jarvis, Third Mate Moran, Toppy, Swede, and young Rick Nichols experience strange events delaying the departure of the *Araby* from San Francisco to Papeete, including a stolen suitcase, a smuggled object, an eventual trip on the *Wind-Rider* to Taranoa with old friend Stan Ridley, a murder, and the possible theft of an original undiscovered Paul Gauguin painting completed while he lived in Tahiti. Copyright: Howard Pease (1953) and Doubleday and Company, NY (1953)

1957 Shipwreck

Two schooners disappear in the remote South Pacific islands area of the Tanga Sea and Jorango. The ships are never found, nor are the crews. One was captained by James Mitchum. His son Renny, in search of his father, gains a berth on the schooner *Samarang*, bound for Jorango. During the voyage, he learns that the mission is to investigate the fate of the missing ships, with the blame for their loss pointing to Captain Mitchum. Copyright: Howard Pease (1957) and Doubleday and Company, NY (1957)

1961: Mystery on Telegraph Hill

Pease, in his last major book written at age 67, returns to create his thirteenth Tod Moran mystery. He employs a unique technique in story telling, using taped “interviews” with each of the key characters. He also includes Tod’s brother, Neil, and his wife Shelia, who were major characters from the first Pease book, The Tattooed Man, along with their now 8-year old son, Jeff.

The *Araby* is docked in San Francisco for a week. Tod visits Neil and Shelia to bring nephew Jeff a gift—a horrible devil mask from his last South Pacific voyage. On his way back to the *Araby*, in an extremely dense fog, Tod is knocked down, slugged, taken into a row house, and finally thrown into the street to be found by the police. Charged with a jewelry store robbery and murder, Tod is in jail. Captain Jarvis, Toppy, Swede, Neil, Sheila, Jeff, and “the devil mask” seek clues pointing toward another suspect to convince the police to investigate further the Mystery on Telegraph Hill. Copyright: Doubleday and Company, NY (1961)

D. Summary

Howard Pease started writing while still in school, and was published most often in his early years as an author of short story mysteries for the *American Boy’s Magazine*, produced by Sprague Publishers, and in the *Classmate Stories* magazine. His first major sea story book was The Tattooed Man, written in 1926 at the age of 32. He continued teaching, writing, and lecturing extensively until age 67 (1961) when he semi-retired until his death in 1974 at the age of 80 years.

He continued writing during World War II, with Heart of Danger based upon the Nazi control of Europe. He spent most of his life in the San Francisco area; California was fortunate to retain a native author from birth to death, except for time spent in journeys on ship, and his temporary residence times in other countries.

This reviewer, always a fan, was privileged to meet with Howard Pease in 1943 when at age 52 he had just completed Night Boat, a copy of which was autographed for this reviewer. Pease was most cordial and an excellent speaker; he spent many of his hours in those days helping teachers learn how to interest their students in writing and reading. Perhaps his greatest contribution was enticing boys of middle school age to venture into the library—searching for more books written by Howard Pease or similar writers of adventure stories.

